



The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 24 August 1968



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THE PRESIDENT'S
DAILY BRIEF
24 AUGUST 1968

1. Czechoslovakia
(As of 5:00 AM
EDT)

There were no major changes in the situation overnight.

Main interest is focused on Moscow where Svoboda remains for a second day of talks with Soviet leaders. There are no real clues on how these talks are going, although Svoboda, who originally had planned to return to Prague last night, may have found the Russians willing to negotiate some concessions in order to get an acceptable regime in Prague as quickly as possible.

In Czechoslovakia the Soviets continue their efforts to round up liberal party and government leaders where and when they can find them. There has been some shooting in Prague, but the embassy reports it "hardly of the dramatic proportions" being reported by the press services this morning.

The extraordinary congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party adjourned yesterday after designating another liberal acting first secretary pending Dubcek's return. There are unconfirmed reports that Dubcek has been taken to Moscow and is now with the Svoboda delegation.

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Outrage at the invasion of Czechoslovakia is not confined to the Free World. Many bloc representatives have been embarrassed and some openly critical.

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2. Rumania

The Rumanians are deeply concerned over the possibility of a Soviet invasion.

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3. Communist China

Red Guard fighting has destroyed the heart of Nanning, the important South China city on the rail line to North Vietnam. Satellite photography taken on 11 August shows fire-gutted buildings covering an area one mile by one-half mile in the center of the city. The destruction probably took place in late July when Red Guard factions fought it out in Nanning. There is no sign of damage to the rail line.

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4. South Vietnam

The country-wide attacks of the past few days follow a pattern prisoners said would characterize the opening phase of the "third offensive." The Communists appear to be probing-- and perhaps feinting--to screen troop movements.

This approach, certainly more cautious than the slam-bang tactics of the Tet or the May-June offensives, seems designed to cut down casualties while preserving the capability to launch major attacks against key targets.

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Huong now says he has succeeded in damping down the frictions that have plagued his government. As a result, he has decided that the cabinet reshuffle which has been in the works for several weeks is no longer necessary.

5. Algeria

Plots and rumors of plots against Boumediene continue to point up the uneasy political situation. Boumediene's chronic inability to come to grips with the country's many problems only fuels the intrigues.

Coup plotters in exile, however, lack backing in Algeria and those in the regime spend as much time plotting against each other as they do against Boumediene. If some of these diverse groups could pull themselves together, they might be able to pull him down.

6. Nationalist China

Chiang Kai-shek has given effective control of the Kuomintang Party to his son. This pretty well ties up the succession for Chiang Ching-kuo, who also runs the defense and security establishments.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

- 1.) Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
- 2.) North Vietnamese Reflections of U S
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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
for the President's Eyes Only

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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Propaganda: Communist propaganda is giving heavy play to the current fighting in South Vietnam, but the treatment falls well short of the emphasis given to the opening phases of offensives earlier this year. As of 23 August, the new fighting was still not being characterized as a new country-wide general offensive. The Liberation Front's first significant commentary on the fighting, broadcast late on 20 August, addressed itself only to the attacks on Tay Ninh Province. It characterized these as the prelude to a general offensive throughout the province. This treatment is in marked contrast to the radio commentary which accompanied not only the Tet fighting but also the second round of action in early May. In the May attacks, the Communists were on the air within twenty-four hours calling the outbreak of fighting a "new phase" and "another general offensive."

Some of the propaganda commentary seems to say that this time the Communists are trying to avoid the mistakes and excessive losses of earlier offensives by tailoring their tactics to more modest objectives than were set before. References to skillful use of infantry and artillery, timely attacks in many places at the same time, and proper use of the three kinds of Communist forces (guerrilla, regional, and main force) all suggest a more careful and deliberate employment of military resources than has been true in earlier offensives this year. Although deductions based on propaganda are far from conclusive, the Communists' treatment of the attacks so far suggests they are trying to sustain a more effective offensive effort than they were able to mount earlier this year.

The conclusion of the Liberation Front commentary on 20 August also suggests the Communists are sensitive to charges that the lull in the fighting in June and July showed weakness. In a defensive rebuttal of this charge, the commentary said that the scale of the

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new fighting gives the lie to the contention that there is a "lull in the fighting" and that the Viet Cong "are not in a position to stage large-scale attacks."

This statement could be interpreted as an official denial--by southern Communists at least--that the lull of the past two months is related to the peace talks in Paris. The broadcast, however, was in Vietnamese for domestic consumption and was probably aimed at putting the best possible face on recent Communist activity.

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Floods: Photography of 18 August confirms that there has been widespread flooding in northern North Vietnam. The flooding has extensively damaged the rail lines from Hanoi to Haiphong and Yen Bai and the line to the south as well. Photography did not cover the rail line from Dong Dang to Hanoi

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL
ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

There is nothing of significance to report today.

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